

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 PM-07 L-03 NSC-10 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-04 RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01

SPC-03 AID-20 DRC-01 /119 W

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R 121456Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2174

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, NI

SUBJECT: ANOTHER YEAR WITHOUT POLITICS

REF: LAGOS A-285, DECEMBER 13, 1973

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS, GOWON HAS MADE  
CLEAR THERE WILL BE NO RETURN TO OPEN POLITICAL ACTIVITY  
BEFORE OCTOBER 1974 AT EARLIEST AND PERHAPS NOT EVEN THEN.  
END SUMMARY

1. IN COURSE PRESS CONFERENCE AT ENUGU AIRPORT DECEMBER 17,  
GENERAL GOWON MADE TYPICALLY DELPHIC REMARK ABOUT FUTURE  
POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN NIGERIA TO WHICH NEWSPAPERS HAVE  
ACCORDED WIDELY VARIED INTERPRETATIONS.

2. IN DAILY TIMES VERSION, ECHOED BY SEVERAL OTHER PAPERS,  
POINT OF GOWON'S REMARK WAS TO SUGGEST THAT LIFTING OF BAN  
ON POLITICAL ACTIVITIES LIKELY WHEN CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
IS COMPLETED IN OCTOBER 1974. OTHER PAPERS, INCLUDING OBSERVER  
AND RENAISSANCE, STRESSED GOWON REAFFIRMATION THAT NO  
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POLITICAL ACTIVITY WOULD BE PERMITTED PRIOR TO OCTOBER 1974

BUT WERE FAR LESS POSITIVE ABOUT PROSPECTS THEREAFTER.

3. ACCORDING TO INFORMATION MINISTRY OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE FOR NBC NEWS, GOWON DID ACTUALLY SAY SPECIFICALLY THAT POLITICAL ACTIVITY WOULD BE ALLOWED NEXT OCTOBER. SOURCE ADDED CAUTIONARY NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT REMARK WAS UNPLANNED AND OFF THE CUFF AND THUS SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS STATEMENT OF FMG POLICY SINCE "GOWON MIGHT SAY SOMETHING DIFFERENT TOMORROW."

4. SENIOR MEA OFFICIAL WHO SAW GOWON DAY AFTER HIS PRESS CONFERENCE AND MENTIONED TO HIM DISCREPANCY IN PRESS ACCOUNTS TOLD EMBOFF THAT GOWON'S REACTION WAS ONE OF CONSIDERABLE AMUSEMENT ACCOMPANIED BY VAGUE STATEMENT THAT NONE OF PAPERS HAD QUOTED HIM CORRECTLY. ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, GOWON SEEMED UNCERTAIN OF EXACT WORDS HE HAD IN FACT USED, BUT GAVE IMPRESSION THAT HIS INTENTION HAD SIMPLY BEEN TO DEFER DECISION ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY AT LEAST UNTIL NEXT OCTOBER. MEA OFFICIAL ADDED THAT PRESS ACCOUNTS SO VAGUE THAT IT NOT EVEN CLEAR WHETHER GOWON REFERRING ONLY TO CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN OR PERHAPS THINKING OF MAINTAINING BAN ON POLITICS INTO NEXT PLAN PERIOD.

5. COMMENT: WE SHARE VIEW OF OUR MEA SOURCE THAT NO DECISION HAS YET BEEN TAKEN BY FMG ON FUTURE POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND THAT GOWON'S REPLY WAS DESIGNED SIMPLY TO END SPECULATION THAT LIFTING OF BAN MIGHT BE IMMINENT. AS REPORTED REFAIRGRAM, SUBJECT WAS RAISED WHEN HEALTH COMMISSIONER AMINU KANO CALLED ON FMG TO LIFT BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY "WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY", TO WHICH GOWON REPLIED AT EARLIER PRESS CONFERENCE IN SAME VEIN AS LATEST REMARKS. THIS REITERATION OF GOWON'S VIEW SHOULD DAMPEN DEBATE FOR A WHILE WITHOUT FORECLOSING ANY FMG OPTIONS.  
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